

**FOR WORSHIP AND DEFENSE**

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**A BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS**

**BY JOHN H. FINLEY**

**PRESIDENT OF  
THE COLLEGE OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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## BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS.

BY PRESIDENT FINLEY.

Young Men of the Class of February, 1913:

The President of the United States, speaking in this very place a few weeks ago, said that one feels "as if one were here in the presence of the imperial city of this country"; that coming up the North River or standing upon the Brooklyn Bridge, one (if an American), is stirred by a feeling of pride in this great metropolis, but that there is no other scene "which brings home to one the sense of the greatness of the City of New York as *'this presence'*."

But what is this "presence" which gives better definition or suggestion of the greatness of this city than the wonderful spectacle which confronts one entering this lordly river, or than that still more wonderful spectacle which one sees from the Brooklyn Bridge in an early winter's evening when the lights of man's enterprise and industry are carried high up into the dome of the stars? I do not, of course, know what was specifically in the mind of the President, but taking his statement that here, within these very walls, the best definition was to be found of that which gives this city its rightful eminence among the cities of the earth, of to-day and of time, I ask you young men who have been of the very spirit and body of this "presence" to consider, as you are about to leave it, what its high import is.

From the West Gate, which bears the name of the discoverer of the River, we have daily glimpse of that river which gave the world three hundred years ago, in the phrase of our Professor Johnston, a "new trading destination." From the white towers we have nightly sight of the pillars of fire, of the cloud of lights which hangs continually, in darkness, over the city of unceasing activity. "Flumen et Lumen" the ancient Roman would have exclaimed, looking outward upon this scene,—the eternal stream, the exhaustless, unquenched light. But if he had come within the walls, and learned the meaning of this

place, he would doubtless have cried "Numen"—the divinity is here, whatever the creed of the worshipers.

One who went out from this College years ago and who is now augur of winds and clouds, heat and cold, at the Golden Gate on the other coast of the continent, said in an essay which came to me a few days since: "Of modern cities, some have souls and some are soulless. Mostly they are huge melting pots of nations,"—"too often crucibles where Mede, Elamite and Parthian are fused in one" over the "reducing heat of business zeal." But he took as title for his book a flaming phrase of hope which came from the altar of this very hall, to intimate that here the soul of a city so often put in the soulless class was manifesting itself in a spiritual, intellectual aspiration whose fusing fires would burn more fiercely and effectively than the flame of mere "business zeal."

So I would write over the entrance to this place the words which Linnaeus, the great scientist, wrote over his own door—"Numen adest"—the divinity is near, the divinity is here. Here is the city's sacred enclosure, the place of its worship and defense, and so, in a very accurate sense, the Acropolis, the "Lofty City," the "Top of the City."

In seeing a few days ago, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the model of the Acropolis of ancient Athens, I was struck by the fact that the space which this city has set apart for its own uses on the crown of this hill is practically of the dimensions of that renowned summit which bore the most famous and artistically most important buildings in the history of man, and of about the same altitude above the city just below.

But it is not simply the dimensions which give it this distinction, for there are other little plateaus standing at about the same height, which might claim the same similitude of area and height. Its proud and noteworthy resemblance is that it bears, as did the acropolis of Athens and of other ancient cities in their days of greatest glory, the structures which are the city's expression of worship of its ideals and those which are its special and ultimate means of defense, through its discipline of that which is democracy's best hope. The height above Athens was crowded with temples and protected on all sides by walls,



natural or built by men. And the temples were dedicated to the divinity of Wisdom and of Might, to the Protector of Cities.

It was near there that, overlooking the "agora, the city and the Attic plain," the young Athenian took the oath of citizenship, such an oath as you will take this week, and went down to serve his city, which was his state; and it must have been to this very place that he came in every time of victory or of supreme need, for toward it the city itself turned in its very collective emergency of joy or sorrow or fear.

So we have the prototype of what this hill may come to be in the history of this great city of the western world and the modern time,—a lofty interior city in which shall be represented what the greater city most desires in its heart, a lofty city which shall be the place of the intellectual defense of these ideal possessions.

I can remember my disappointment when I first learned that the site of these buildings did not look out upon the River and the Palisades. But that was before I came to think of this as the place to which the city should come to turn in its time of doubt as to the public good, as a place which the people in their councils would face as the citizens of Athens in their assemblies faced their Acropolis. I did not then have even the dimmest vision of what this College might be, except as a school of hard discipline, shut away, as much as possible, from the life of the city.

But I would not now, if I could, have its lecture rooms and laboratories built, except those of the Preparatory Hall, on a secluded site, or in a place where their windows would look away from the problems of those whom the wisdoms of this place ought ever to be concerned about. Undisturbed, cloistered conditions are needed for the development of certain temperaments, perhaps for certain tasks of scholarship. The ancient oracles sat in secluded places. But there is a deep need of a learning that is kept from pedantry, and dilettanteism and selfishness and exclusiveness only by its daily converse with the world about, that does not lose the human sympathies with which it started, that looks often from its book to see the life that it is some day to try to better.

You lack certain college spirit, we hear it constantly

complained, though I believe you are as loyal to your College as the men of any other; and we are unable to do for you what we might do if you were kept apart from the city, if your speech, your manners, your minds, were under the constant monopolizing influence of a separate community of teaching, tradition and habit. But precious, dangerously precious as that gift is, it cannot be had here; and so we must think of heightening the other good, of touching the life of the city every day through the home and neighborhood out of which you come every morning and to which you go back every night, and then of sending you back with a mind inured to serious thought, inspired of the noblest examples of living, to improve the very conditions by which you have yourselves been surrounded.

So whatever the advantage and delights of study in Dodona or Delphi (a country place of wisdom), the city needs the defences of the nearer and more intimate ministries. She needs her acropolis, the visible sign of the continuing presence of her own best aspirations.

And increasingly is she to have strength of this hill, crowned with these buildings to her many-officed divinity, who, as the legend on the painting before you describes her in the language of another culture, "sits in the top of high places, by the way in the places of the paths, at the coming in at the gates",—spiritual strength, and physical even.

It is interesting to observe the new ministries that are being added to the old, ministries that carry in them the memories of sacred offices as ancient as Athens herself. A few days ago, in one of the laboratories, I saw a class of picked men, gathered about the carcass of a diseased cow, much as ancient and sacred haruspices over the entrails of some animal, from which they were seeking to divine future events. These young modern haruspices, who in the midst of their studies in philosophy, economics, aesthetics and other such subjects, had made journeys of inspection to the sources of milk and other food supplies for the city, were seeking to know how they could detect the sources of tuberculosis infection, so that when they go from their studies here, they will have had not only



the broad, basic disciplines of cultured men, but a liberalized desire with respect to their service.

This intimates what I believe is to be the new liberal culture; not one that covers superficially the ever-widening field of the human knowledges, but one that liberalizes a disciplined mind by giving it a social,—an unselfish purpose. And certainly, no man can go from this presence with else than such a purpose, a purpose broader than his own personal or family advantage. Pericles, in that immortal oration over the Athenian dead in the Peloponnesian War, said: "We alone regard one who takes no interest in public affairs not as a harmless, but as a useless character." And we should regard one who went out from this presence inflamed of no love for this city or desire to serve it, as a "useless character."

I congratulated your older brothers a few nights ago that they were born into such a responsibility as is yours. For, while this Acropolis belongs to the entire city, from the remotest cape of Staten Island to the borders of Westchester and out to the hills which one can see beyond the Sound, in Long Island, you and they are of its garrison, the born and sworn disciples of its divinity. Yours and theirs is the responsibility of maintaining here the worship of the noblest ideals a city ever cherished, and of defending those ideals from invasion by any vicious theory from without or from any desecration of indifference from within.

I have asked you to go with me to that Old World hill whose broken columns still tell us of the "glory that was Greece," in order that you might there have definition or intimation of the "presence" which is here; in order that you may here feel with me the splendid and uncommon task which is ours, of helping to transmute this "presence," which we are likely to think commonplace because familiar, into a lasting glory upon this New World hill, fronting the "baths of all the stars"; that we may together, with our brothers, build impregably on these rocks a citadel which shall not be merely what the poet dreamed, "some cape sublime" frowning upon the "idle foam of time," but a true acropolis, a place to which the people shall come in worship of the best things, a place from which men shall go out to touch all the time that

passes, the millions of days that are lived every day within the sight of its towers. For more than ten thousand years are being lived this very day by those who support this College, and in one week all historied time will have been spanned if the days of all this people are put together. What an opportunity is yours, my young baccalaurii, to multiply your own lives into an eternity by serving efficiently and unselfishly this city, whose every day is ten thousand years, whose every year is five million years, and whose stretch of years is as infinity.